

“Changing Conceptions of the Opium War as History and Experience”
(Paper to be presented at the AAS conference at Toronto in 2017)

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Academic and popular accounts of the Opium War have gone through nearly two centuries of change in focus, view, and scope.¹ Before the era of social history, the focus was on its political and institutional aspects; topics ranged from British imperialism to China’s failure to re-enter the world system as a nation. After the rise of the “China-centered approach,” however, though popular accounts focused on diplomacy and battles, most researchers abandoned the topic altogether. As cultural studies gained momentum, many scholars widened their scope to include the cultural and social facets of opium consumption but paid less attention to the war itself. Only in the wake of post-colonial studies did we return. Since then, knowledge and understandings of the war have been enhanced by putting China’s modern transition into global contexts and seeing it in a longer sweep of history. This study intends to probe this sequence of changes in the writing of history as they appeared in different periods. I will first examine the period before the 1960s.

In many ways, the study of Chinese history from the very beginning up to the mid 1960s was undertaken under the strong influence of the Euro-centered perspective of global history as well as the teleological view of global changes. This is obvious in the focus of the research—the type of historical questions being asked and the answers historians were looking for—most of which was based on the assumption that China was a country of backward tradition and had to depend on stimuli from modern countries from Europe and North America to better itself.

With regards to the Opium War the main focus, aside from European imperialism, is how the Qing dynasty interacted with the West as a traditional

¹ We usually consider that the Opium War consists of two wars: one, the Opium War, also known as the First Opium War, took place between the British Empire and the Chinese Qing Dynasty from 1839 to 1842; the other, the Arrow War named after the British vessel involved in the incident that led to the war, also known as the Second Opium War, pitted the British Empire and the Second French Empire against the Chinese Qing dynasty from 1856 to 1860. It is not unusual for these separate wars to be seen as one, with the latter one as the continuation of the former. For example, scholars in mainland China usually consider the Arrow War a continuation of the First Opium War, presumably a result of the influence of Karl Max’s view on the war. To some degree, British scholars like Jack Beeching also consider the two wars as one; hence he calls them “the Opium Wars.” I agree with J. Y. Wong that both wars share one common cause: the opium trade. Therefore, I will use the term “Opium War” to include both wars. For Wong’s discussion of the definition, see J. Y. Wong, *Deadly Dreams: Opium, Imperialism, and the Arrow War (1856-1860) in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 37.

society with the “middle-kingdom” mindset while treating the opium trade as a part of its tributary system. Although this type of researches were short lived because of the disappearing of interest in international and diplomatic histories among Chinese historians by the late 1960s, a large number of scholars in the U.S. moved their investigation to the question of how China’s attempt to strengthen itself after defeat can be understood in the framework of China’s response to the West. This was done in a way that we have overemphasized the significance of the Opium War in the changes within China itself.²

If we take a close look at the publications in that period, we will find that the attempts to theorize the Opium War mostly fall along the line of three dominant discourses: the British intention to start the war, British imperialism, and China’s reentering the world system as one of the nations. Within these discourses, there was generally lack of attention on the Chinese people who were impacted by the war. Only in the rise of social history, scholars like Federic Wakeman began to focus their attention on the people. Here is a detailed view of how we comprehended the war ever since it broke out:

The earliest publications related to the Opium War were personal memoirs that appeared in Britain shortly after the war ended and had a strong influence on the later scholarship on the war. One such example was the memoir by Sir Rutherford Alcock, the first British minister to Japan. In the memoir, Alcock suggests that commerce was the sole objective for the British in Siam, China, and Japan in the nineteenth century and that it was necessary to use coercive force to “amalgamate two civilizations,” such as the British and the Chinese.³

Alcock’s view was echoed in later publications from a group of authors, most of whom were British themselves, that created one of the main discourses on the war characterizing itself by focusing on the British intention in China as reflected in its policy and the justification of using coercive force to achieve its goal. Within this discourse, Phillip Joseph argues that Britain’s main purpose in China as demonstrated in her policy was commercial, albeit it led to the war.⁴ David Edward Owen compares British policy towards opium trade in China and India.⁵ William

² See similar discussion by Cohen, in Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), xiii.

³ Rutherford Alcock, "The Capital of the Tycoon: A Narrative of a Three Years' Residence in Japan," ed. original from the University of Virginia (London,: Harper & brothers, 1863), 304.

⁴ Joseph’s book was mostly known for his argument that 1894, a time long after the Opium War ended, was the turning point in China when the country began to disintegrate. Philip Joseph, *Foreign Diplomacy in China, 1894-1900: A Study in Political and Economic Relations with China*, Studies in Economics and Political Science (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1928).

⁵ David Edward Owen, "British Opium Policy in China and India" (Originally submitted as a doctoral dissertation, Yale University, 1927 cf Pref, Yale University Press;

L. Langer insists that the British interest in China was basically commercial, not territorial, although Langer recognizes the period between 1840 and 1870 as one characterized by imperialism in British history.⁶

Criticism of this view came from Nathan A. Pelcovits and Gerald S. Graham. Pelcovits separated the intention of the British government from that of British merchants. In his book, he shows that while officials, especially those in the British foreign office, wanted no interference with China's internal affairs, the merchants were eager to open that country to the British by any means, even war.⁷ Graham argues that the British had no coherent colonial policy towards countries like China in the mid-nineteenth century. Its general approach was being practical. In that sense, the war was rather unavoidable.⁸

At the same time, upon the question about whether it was necessary to use military force, P.C. Kuo suggests that while the British opened China by force, their action nevertheless introduced China to rest of the world.⁹ W.C. Costin tries to show how the use of force by the British army against the Chinese in 1858 was a necessity "to meet the duplicity, evasion, cunning and cruelty of the Chinese officials."¹⁰ Victor G. Kiernan attempts to justify the war with the argument that imperialism did bring some progress to China, although it also brought damage to that country.¹¹ Finally, Michael Greenberg extends this view by suggesting that the war after all brought "the power of the British state to bear directly on the China trade."¹²

Parallel to the above discussions, there was a second discourse surrounding the theme of imperialism, especially British imperialism. John A. Hobson stresses that the domestic markets of the western European countries were unable to keep

H. Milford Oxford University Press, 1934).

⁶ Although his main discussion concerns the later part of the nineteenth century, Langer expressed his view on the war when he was analyzing the British policy towards China during the period between 1840 and 1870. William L. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890-1902*, 2 vols. (New York, London,: A.A. Knopf, 1935).

⁷ Nathan A. Pelcovits, *Old China Hands and the Foreign Office* (New York,: Pub. under the auspices of American Institute of Pacific Relations by the King's Crown Press, 1948).

⁸ Gerald Sandford Graham, *Great Britain in the Indian Ocean: A Study of Maritime Enterprise 1810-1850* (Oxford,: Clarendon P., 1967). Gerald S. Graham, *The China Station: War and Diplomacy 1830-1860* (Oxford,: Oxford University Press, 1978).

⁹ Pin Chia Kuo, *A Critical Study of the First Anglo-Chinese War* (Shanghai, China,: The Commercial press, limited, 1935).

¹⁰ W. C. Costin, *Great Britain and China, 1833-1860* (Oxford,: The Clarendon Press, 1937).

¹¹ V. G. Kiernan, *British Diplomacy in China, 1880 to 1885* (Cambridge Eng.: The University Press, 1939).

¹² Quoted from Yangwen Zheng, "The Social Life of Opium in China," *Modern Asian Studies* 37, no. 1 (2003): 87.

up with the demand for market of the industrialists who in turn put pressure on their governments to secure access to overseas territories for market expansion as well as guaranteed long term availability of resources.¹³ V. I. Lenin perceives that the ever increasing chasm between capital and the working classes in European societies would inevitably lead to a crisis within the capitalist system itself on the one hand and overseas imperialism on the other.¹⁴ In Joseph Alois Schumpeter's perception, the industrial nations in Europe were deeply rooted in the warrior culture that was facing its extinction in a new capitalist order.¹⁵

Many of these theoreticians used China as an example of European imperialism overseas. While seeing British missionaries as an imperium in imperio that were above Chinese law, John A. Hobson considers the underlying reason for imperialism to be the capitalist development that inevitably led to the expansion of European countries looking for new markets and places of investment.¹⁶ Citing Hobson's book, V. I. Lenin also uses China as an example to argue that imperialism is the highest stage of monopoly capitalism. A capitalist country like Great Britain had to rely on preying on a weaker nation like China to continue its capitalist development.¹⁷ Also influenced by Hobson, Arthur J. Sargent supports Hobson's view of British imperialism in China, while suggesting that the Opium War is misnamed because the war was not all about opium. He argues that the Treaty of Nanking did not refer to the war as the Opium War.¹⁸

A voice of dissent first came from Sir John Pratt. Pratt insists that what the British did in China was different from being imperialistic, because what imperialism aimed at was "domination and the destruction of political independence." Instead, Pratt says, the British policy in the Far East was "immutably fixed by one governing consideration—the essential identity of interest between China and Great Britain." Pratt stresses, "when China suffers British interests suffer, and when China prospers British interests also prosper."¹⁹

As a compromise between these conflicting views, John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson offered a new term: "imperialism of free trade." Gallagher and

¹³ J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism : A Study* (New York: Gordon Press, 1975).

¹⁴ Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New York,: International publishers, 1933).

¹⁵ Joseph Alois Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes* (New York,: A.M.Kelly, 1951).

¹⁶ J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism; a Study* (New York,: J. Pott & Company, 1902), 215.

¹⁷ Lenin.

¹⁸ A. J. Sargent, *Anglo-Chinese Commerce and Diplomacy (Mainly in the Nineteenth Century)* (Oxford,: Clarendon Press, 1907), 87.

¹⁹ John Thomas Pratt, *War and Politics in China* (London,: J. Cape, 1943). Quoted from William Roger Louis, Robin William Winks, and Alaine Margaret Low, *The Oxford History of the British Empire / Volume V, Historiography* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford university press, 1999), Texte imprimé, xxix.

Robinson defines this particular type of imperialism as “a sufficient political function of this process of integrating new regions into the expanding economy” In other words, the British activities overseas, such as in China and Latin America, were necessary to bring those countries into the world of free trade.²⁰

This “imperialism of free trade” notion soon sparked a debate of its own. Platt expresses some doubts about the concept that imperialism of free trade was for opening world markets.²¹ In an article, “The Imperialism of Free Trade: Some Reservations,” Platt specifically airs his disagreement. Platt’s criticism continued when he responded to Gallagher and Robinson’s rebuttal.²² However, D. K. Fieldhouse supports the notion by using the Opium War as an example. Fieldhouse adamantly argues that the British had only one objective in China for the war, which was trade.²³

While this exchange was going on, Edmund S. Wehrle offered his alternative in the term “informal imperialism.” Wehrle uses this term to describe the British attempt to create an informal empire in China, similar to India.²⁴ However, this term also received objection from people like Britten Dean. Yet the “informal imperialism” idea continues to attract attention even recently.²⁵

The third discourse on the Opium War rose roughly in the beginning of the twentieth century by emphasizing how China was forced to interact with the industrialized countries from Europe and North America before and after the war as a nation, rather than “the center of the world” (tianxia 天下, lit., under heaven). These studies showed a strong interest in international relations as well as diplomatic history. Hosea Ballou Morse, a former officer in the Chinese Imperial Maritime Service, wrote the first book on the relationship between the Qing dynasty and the industrialized countries by using the British Parliamentary Papers

²⁰ John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, “The Imperialism of Free Trade,” *Economic History Review* VI, no. 1 (1953).

²¹ D. C. M. Platt, *Finance, Trade, and Politics in British Foreign Policy 1815-1914* (Oxford, London,: Clarendon P., 1968).

²² “The Imperialism of Free Trade: Some Reservations,” *Economic History Review* 21 (1968). “Further Objection to an ‘Imperialism of Free Trade,’” *Economic History Review* 26 (1973).

²³ David K. Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire 1830-1914*, World Economic History (New York: Cornell University Press, 1973).

²⁴ Edmund S. Wehrle, *Britain, China, and the Antimissionary Riots, 1891-1900* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966).

²⁵ Britten Dean, *China and Great Britain: The Diplomacy of Commercial Relations, 1860-1864*, Harvard East Asian Monographs (Cambridge, Mass.: East Asian Research Center Distributed by Harvard University Press, 1974). “British Informal Empire: The Case of China,” *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* xiv (1976). For an example of recent discussion on “informal imperialism,” see Jeffrey A. Auerbach and Peter H. Hoffenberg, *Britain, the Empire, and the World at the Great Exhibition of 1851*, (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub. Co., 2008).

that contained the collections of treaties, consular reports, and publications of the Imperial Maritime Customs, and had just become available to the public.

Although the main focus of the book was not the war, the book did provide a perspective on the war in light of that relationship.²⁶

After Morse, Westel W. Willoughby surveyed the events that led to the war. Based on his survey, Willoughby provided a theory that China and the industrialized nations were on a collision course when they interacted with each other. He suggests that the war was the result of two conflicting state behaviors: on the Chinese side, “the Chinese asserting their territorial jurisdiction, but refusing to enter into formal diplomatic relations with western nations as with equals, and failing to fulfill other obligations which were recognized by accepted international law and practice as resting upon all independent states.” On the British side, “the foreigners refusing to admit their amenability to local laws and local authorities.”²⁷ Focusing on the same subject, Earl H. Pritchard finds the roots of confrontation between Britain and China during the war going back to their relationship in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.²⁸

A few years later, John Fairbank and Ssu-yü Têng published their article "On the Ch'ing tributary system". Although the article was not intended for the discussion of the war per se, it nevertheless had a strong influence on the general understanding of the war as well as its impact by advancing the view that the Qing dynasty considered itself as the “middle-kingdom” and treated opium trade as a part of its tributary system.²⁹

Fairbank and Teng, relying on the only available materials, such as the Qing archives, continued to publish on subjects related to the war in the 1950s, when diplomatic history, along with intellectual history, remained popular among sinologists. For instance, in one publication, Fairbank scrutinizes the opening of treaty ports in China as the result of the war.³⁰ In another, Fairbank uses the term

²⁶ Hosea Ballou Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire* (London, New York [etc.]: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1910).

²⁷ Westel Woodbury Willoughby, *Foreign Rights and Interests in China* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1920), 465.

²⁸ Earl Hampton Pritchard, *Anglo-Chinese Relations During the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1929). *The Crucial Years of Early Anglo-Chinese Relations, 1750-1800*, Research Studies of the State College of Washington (Washington: Pulman, 1936).

²⁹ John King Fairbank and S. Y. Teng, "On the Ch'ing Tributary System," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 6, no. 2 (1941).

³⁰ John King Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast; the Opening of the Treaty Ports, 1842-1854*, Harvard Historical Studies, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953).

“synarchy” to describe the institution jointly formed by the two governments of the British and the Qing to govern the treaty ports after the Second Opium War.³¹

Sharing a similar interest in international history with Fairbank and Teng, Immanuel C. Y. Hsu investigated how China entered the “family of nations” reluctantly, by expediency. Hsu suggests it was not nationalism that drove China into taking these steps but rather the sheer calculation of its survival and interests. However, the rise of nationalism occurred after China took these steps.³²

This discourse was cut short partly because the interest in international history, as well as diplomatic history, was waning by the late 1960s. Further, a group of scholars in the U.S. decided to focus their attention on the question of China’s attempt to strengthen itself after the defeat, rather than the issues related to the war itself, after Fairbank and Teng published their book, *China’s Response to the West: A Documentary Survey, 1839-1923*.

Aside from the above studies, there were also scholars who addressed specific issues related to the war. One such issue has to do with the opium trade. As Jacques M. Down has shown, “by the late 1830s, opium was the basis of East-West commerce. It balanced the payments and was the economic foundation of the Canton foreign community.” And, to some degree, both China and the British needed opium.³³ Peter Ward Fay has demonstrated that the war was seen by the British as a way to “recover the value” of the opium and the expenses lost before the war.³⁴ Jack Beeching presents accounts from British and American traders about Chinese opium addiction and how it led to the Opium War.³⁵ Frederic E. Wakeman suggests that opium was at the heart of Canton trade before the war.³⁶

Another issue has to do with the role of protagonists in the aftermath of the war. Ssu-yü Têng has examined the role of Chang Hsi—the assistant to one of the

³¹ See similar discussion in Donna Brunero, *Britain's Imperial Cornerstone in China the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854-1949*, (London; New York: Routledge, 2006). 7.

³² Immanuel C. Y. Hsü, *China's Entrance into the Family of Nations: The Diplomatic Phase, 1858-1880*, Harvard East Asian Series (Cambridge,; Harvard University Press, 1960).

³³ Jacques M. Downs, "Merchants and the China Opium Trade," *The Business History Review* 42, no. 4 (1968). Quoted from Eileen Scully, "Still Strangers at the Gate: Recent Scholarship on Pre-1900 Sino-American Relations," in *Pacific Passage: The Study of American--East Asian Relations on the Eve of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Warren I. Cohen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 124.

³⁴ Peter Ward Fay, *The Opium War, 1840-1842: Barbarians in the Celestial Empire in the Early Part of the Nineteenth Century and the War by Which They Forced Her Gates Ajar* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 194-95.

³⁵ Jack Beeching, *The Chinese Opium Wars*, 1st American ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975).

³⁶ Frederic E. Wakeman, "The Canton Trade and the Opium War," in *The Cambridge History of China*, ed. Denis Crispin Twitchett and John King Fairbank (Cambridge [Eng.] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

chief negotiators of the Qing dynasty, Yilibu—in the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing.³⁷ Hsin-pao Chang uses the diaries of Lin Zexu himself to investigate Lin's role in the origin of the Opium War.³⁸

By all means, the publication of Frederic Wakeman's book, *Strangers at the Gate*, in 1966 was a sharp departure from all the above paradigms. For the first time, there appeared a research examining the effect of the war on Chinese society, especially how it ultimately became the root cause for the Taiping Rebellion. By highlighting the social and economic changes after the war underlining the rural disorder, secret society activities, and wide spread discontent, Wakeman not only brought to our attention to the interconnectedness between the war and the Chinese local society, but also paid specific attention to the merchants, the gentry, and the villagers who were deeply impacted by the changes.³⁹

However, Wakeman's work met with a field of China study whose interest in the war had already begun to wane. Right after Wakeman, there were less than a handful who had published their writings on the war, even counting those who were not historians. Here is a list of these publications: Douglas Hurd (British diplomat in Beijing and a member of the British Parliament) wrote *The Arrow War: An Anglo-Chinese Confusion, 1856-1860* (1967).⁴⁰ Journalist Brian Inglis wrote *The Opium War* (1976).⁴¹ Pin-chia Kuo published *A Critical Study of the First Anglo-Chinese War, with Documents* (1973).⁴² And Chung Tan wrote *China and the Brave New World: a Study of the Origins of the Opium War (1840-42)* (1978).⁴³

One of the main reasons for this development was due to the popularization of social history among historians in the U.S., following in the footsteps of European historians such as Albert Soboul and E.P. Thompson.⁴⁴ As advocated by its pioneers, Fernand Braudel and Marc Bloch, social history focuses on historical questions related to societies, using the lenses of, but not limited to, demography,

³⁷ Ss u-yü Têng, *Chang Hsi and the Treaty of Nanking, 1842* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944).

³⁸ Hsin-pao Chang, *Commissioner Lin and the Opium War*, Harvard East Asian Series, (Cambridge,: Harvard University Press, 1964).

³⁹ Frederic E. Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate: Social Disorder in South China, 1839-1861* (Berkeley,: University of California Press, 1966).

⁴⁰ Douglas Hurd, *The Arrow War: An Anglo-Chinese Confusion, 1856-1860* (London,: Collins, 1967).

⁴¹ Brian Inglis, *The Opium War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976).

⁴² Pin-chia Kuo, *A Critical Study of the First Anglo-Chinese War, with Documents* (Westport, Conn.,: Hyperion Press, 1973).

⁴³ Chung Tan, *China and the Brave New World: A Study of the Origins of the Opium War (1840-42)* (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 1978).

⁴⁴ Albert Soboul, *Les Sans-Culottes Parisiens En L'an II* (Paris: Librairie Clavreuil, 1958). E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: V. Gollancz, 1963).

geography, and economy.⁴⁵ Influenced by the French Annales School, social historians in the U.S. not only moved away from the previously popular subjects, such as regime changes, political figures and leading intellectuals, but also found a new niche in research by focusing on local societies. Overall, with the new focus, social historians set out to rediscover societies, locale by locale, which eventually led us to a much better understanding of the globe as a whole. However, by its design, social history was not disposed to address the “big questions” (as Lynn Hunt calls them) such as global changes.⁴⁶

In the field of China studies, social history had already started to take hold in late 1970s and early 1980s, before Cohen’s book appeared. It was nevertheless solidified by Cohen’s advocacy of a “China-centered approach” that coincided with the gradual opening of local archives in China, providing historians on China with the opportunity to produce many high-quality studies.⁴⁷ Thus, between the late 1970s and early 1990s, the field saw many significant achievements in the research on social and economic history, and in particular on local society. Because of the new foci, plus relying mostly, if not solely, on Chinese materials, historians gained a great deal of knowledge about all aspects of Chinese society. These achievements in many ways changed fundamentally our perceptions of China.

Yet, during the same period, most scholars shied away from a topic such as the Opium War to avoid suspicion of having a “Western-centric” view of Chinese history. Before the late 1990s, the only publication appeared in 1992 was James M. Polachek’s book. Actually, Polachek did his work in 1970s. Thus, his work reflected much of the research focus of that period, as he studied the war with an emphasis on social history, paying specific attention to how the war related to internal changes in Chinese society.

Polachek examines Chinese literati’s response to their country’s defeat in the war and its impact on Chinese polity. By revealing how different factions ascended among the Chinese literati amid the response and how the continuing conflict of views and interests among them ultimately influenced the reform afterwards, the author suggests that the response reshaped Chinese society. Polachek thus became

⁴⁵ See discussion in Kevin Passmore, “History and Historiography since 1945,” in *A Historiography of the Modern Social Sciences*, ed. Roger Backhouse and Philippe Fontaine (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 36.

⁴⁶ Lynn Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), 40.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of how the opening of local archives in China corresponded with the rise of interest in social history in the U.S., see Lea H. Wakeman, “Chinese Archives and American Scholarship on Modern Chinese History,” in *Telling Chinese History: A Selection of Essays*, ed. Lea H. Wakeman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 315-29.

one of the very few who joined Wakeman to examine the war from the perspective of social history.⁴⁸

While the field of China studies was in the midst of social history enthusiasm, a new wave of interest in postmodernism was quietly surfacing in the U.S. in the 1980s. Postmodernism started out as philosophical and epistemological discussions on human knowledge, but it soon generated a major shift in paradigmatic thinking in social science and the humanities. Although in the beginning, the earlier generation of postmodernists continued to base their ideas on the critique of modernity, the later generation of poststructuralists soon moved on to denouncing any interpretive model of history.⁴⁹

The New Cultural History sparked a great deal of interest among historians on China in 1990s. Among them, some studied opium consumption, treating it as a cultural phenomenon rather than a topic related to the Opium War. Among those studying Chinese history of science and technology, there were scholars who used methods such as the cross-disciplinary approach, a method used by new cultural historians, for their research. At the same time, the popularity of cultural studies also provided interest in cultural comparison in the public.

As a clear indication of this new interest, for example, a conference took place in Toronto in 1997 that resulted in the publication of a collection of essays, *Opium Regimes: China, Britain, and Japan, 1839-1952* (2000). During the conference, a group of scholars examined a wide range of topics ranging from Chinese merchants' involvement in the British opium trade in the nineteenth century to the success of government control of the opium problem under the Communist regime in the early 1950s, none of which was directly related to the war itself.⁵⁰

This turn of interest led to the publication of a number of important studies in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Although these studies did not target the war, they nevertheless shed some light on the war, especially its cause. For instance, Carl Trocki has shown us how the British depended on opium for maintaining their economic advantage vis-à-vis other industrialized countries. For that reason,

⁴⁸ James M. Polachek, *The Inner Opium War*, Harvard East Asian Monographs (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies/Harvard University: Distributed by the Harvard University Press, 1992).

⁴⁹ The early generation of postmodernists are Hendry de Man, Bertrand de Jouvenel, Arthur Gehlen, and Roderick Seidenberg. The later generation of poststructuralists include Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Michel Foucault.

⁵⁰ For details of the conference and the discussion of the growing interest in cultural studies, see the introduction of Timothy Brook and Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, *Opium Regimes: China, Britain, and Japan, 1839-1952* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

the British extended their opium trade to Asia as an external market, which became the underlying cause of the war in China.⁵¹

Continue to show the influence of post-colonialism and cultural studies, Yangweng Zheng's work has traced the subculture of opium consumption in China back to the mid-Ming from the perspective of the "social life" of opium as a commodity. Zheng's work has enabled us to see how opium consumption ultimately evolved into one of the main factors for the war.⁵²

As a part of the postcolonial discourse, some historians on China began to regain attention to topics related to the Opium War because some see in dealing with such a topic the opportunity to reexamine the issue about Western dominance and its intended discourse in the globe. Some of the new studies made advances in both perspective and sources. Such studies first came from John Wong and Glenn Melancon. In many ways, both studies addressed the same old issue, the cause of the war, but each tried to inject new ideas to the early debate prior to the late 1970s.

For instance, although Wong continued to address issues related to the cause of the war by looking into "the way the British imperialism expressed itself" during the Arrow War, he refutes almost every major argument made by early studies, especially about cultural clashes. Wong suggests that the main reason the British started the war was Britain's conquest of India, although multiple causes interacted with one another to shape the war. Individuals involved in Anglo-Chinese relations from both the British and Chinese sides were as much responsible for creating the war as the British imperial interests at home.⁵³

Like Wong, Melancon also focuses on how the British started the Opium War. Rather than seeing Britain as pursuing its economic interest in China or responding to China's rejection of open trade, Melancon considers the importance of "national honor," sought both by British individuals and the government, as a driving force for the British to start a war with China.⁵⁴ A year later, Harry Gregor Gelber published his work on the war. From this new perspective, Gelber challenges the notion that opium was the impetus for the Opium War and suggests

⁵¹ Carl A. Trocki, *Opium, Empire, and the Global Political Economy: A Study of the Asian Opium Trade, 1750-1950*, Asia's Transformations (London ; New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁵² Zheng. *The Social Life of Opium in China* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁵³ J. Y. Wong, *Deadly Dreams: Opium, Imperialism, and the Arrow War (1856-1860) in China*, Cambridge Studies in Chinese History, Literature, and Institutions (Cambridge [U.K.] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁵⁴ Glenn Melancon, *Britain's China Policy and the Opium Crisis: Balancing Drugs, Violence, and National Honor, 1833-1840* (Hampshire, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003).

that the British did not even realize the damage they had done to the Chinese by bringing opium into the country until after the war.⁵⁵

The end of the twentieth century was by all means a turning point in the study of Chinese history, a true sense of “Chinese Millennium” (Mary A. K. Matossian), as the field witnessed the rise of new interest in global studies. In the 1990s, a group of Chinese historians not only joined the effort of examining China’s contribution to global changes but also went directly ahead to challenge the premises of the Western-centered historical narrative. They did that with their deep knowledge about China, most of which was gained through their engagement in social history.⁵⁶

The leading example of this type of scholarship comes from R. Bin Wong and Kenneth Pomeranz. Wong deliberately juxtaposes European experiences such as the deployment of capitalism, state-making, and popular protest against the Chinese, to reverse the conventional way historians used to analyze Chinese history in comparison with European history. His findings lead him to believe that China and Europe share much similarity in economic development between the sixteenth century and late eighteenth century but a great deal of political difference in terms of state-making almost throughout their histories, from a much earlier period to the twentieth century.⁵⁷

Pomeranz goes directly into the question that lies at the heart of the “rise of the West” metanarrative: what allowed western European countries that were not in any sense “superior” in economic condition or technological innovation in comparison with China before the eighteenth century to get ahead of the rest of

⁵⁵ Harry Gregor Gelber, *Opium, Soldiers and Evangelicals: Britain's 1840-42 War with China, and Its Aftermath* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

⁵⁶ Therefore, Matossian believes that the period should be called “Chinese Millennium” instead of “Medieval Millennium”; see Mary Allerton Kilbourne Matossian, *Shaping World History: Breakthroughs in Ecology, Technology, Science, and Politics* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 3. The examples of the publications are ibid. Samuel A. Adshead, *T'ang China: The Rise of the East in World History* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). Robert Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World: A Global and Ecological Narrative from the Fifteenth to the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 43-57. Chi-ming Yang, *Performing China: Virtue, Commerce, and Orientalism in Eighteenth-Century England, 1660-1760*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

⁵⁷ By examining the cases of taxation resistance, Wong concludes that even up to the nineteenth century, the Chinese state had greater capacity in state control than the European states. Based on his findings, Wong argues, even up to the nineteenth century, Europe possessed no particular advantage compared with China to achieve changes that led to their global dominance in later centuries; only after industrialization did they achieve such an advantage. In addition, western Europeans first developed mechanized technology out of necessity, but it nevertheless gave the early industrialized countries the opportunity to achieve “modular” economic changes, or in Wong’s term, “a discrete cluster of changes.” See Roy Bin Wong, *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of European Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 82, 101, 04, 27, 293.

the globe in economic development afterwards. His concludes that a country like England had easy access to coal and iron as well as readily available primary products and other resources from the New World, which gave the western European countries the advantage in developing a resource-intensive and labor-saving economy based on the development of industrial technology and the expansion of trans-continental trade in the late eighteenth century.⁵⁸

This development in the field of China studies can be seen as the main effort by historians on China to challenge the Western-centered metanarrative in global history. By showing that cultural traditions such as religion, philosophy, and thinking patterns played very little role in the rise of industrialization in Europe that led to the uninterrupted economic growth in these countries, scholars like Kenneth Pomeranz have declared the “rise of the West” a myth rather than a miracle.

Along with these developments in scholarship, some historians working on the Chinese history began to look beyond the early questions about China. This helped bring out a new type of scholarship from James L. Hevia. By combining perspectives from post-colonial studies and transnational history, Hevia examines China’s experiences with modern imperialism during the second Opium War (the Arrow War) as well as after the Boxer Rebellion. Hevia made effort to move away from the “China-centered approach” that dominated China studies during the 1980s and 1990s. He uses British archives to compare, contrast, and supplement materials from China. By doing so, he sets an example for how to approach Chinese history with two sides of the stories when dealing with a subject matter like the Opium War.

Hevia closely scrutinizes how the British, together with other Western powers, succeeded first in “deterritorializing” China—making China give up its ancient institutions the dynasty relied upon to deal with foreign countries—then in “reterritorializing” China—incorporating China into the British colonial establishment in Asia. By researching a wide range of aspects of the British endeavors related to China, Hevia has identified an imperialistic pedagogical project undertaken by the British to force China into joining the transnational order as defined by the British and other early industrialized countries. Although China was never formally colonized by Britain, Hevia argues its history has been

⁵⁸ By comparing social and economic conditions in China with those in western Europe—for instance between the Jiangnan region and England—Pomeranz finds that the two were not that dissimilar in areas such as consumption, life expectancy, and the accessible areas of markets prior to the mid-eighteenth century. See Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

significantly altered by this foreign power. One thing that made James Hevia's study a significant departure from the previous literature is its attention on the war behaviors of the soldiers from EuroAmerican countries who committed to atrocities from lootings to massacres that impacted the life of the Chinese people a great deal.⁵⁹

Since Hevia's research appeared, there has been a renewed interest in the war. With that interest, come two noticeable efforts to not only combine the sources from both Western and Chinese languages but also use materials such as personal diaries and travelers' accounts to supplement the government achieves. In addition to that, some scholars became interested in personal role in the war—such as their views, behavioral style, and individual interest—as an important facet of the war.

One good example of this type of new scholarship comes from Julia Lovell who relies mostly on rich British materials including personal memoirs, diplomatic correspondence, and missionary reports with some Chinese secondary literature. Rather than looking for the causes of the war from imperialism, diplomacy, or opium trade itself, Lovell focuses on the individuals, such as Charles Elliot, Lin Zexu, or even the opium dealers to show us how personal views, ambitions, and even misperceptions were at the roots of the calculation, or the miscalculation, of the British parliament as well as the Qing dynasty that led to the war.⁶⁰

In a similar way, by using sources in both English and Chinese languages—such as those from the European missionaries and travelers as well as the writings of Qing officials—Li Chen shows how the Qing dynasty engaged in cultural confrontation due to mistrust and endless legal battles with the Western countries, in particularly the British, which led to the beginning of the Opium War.⁶¹

Song-Chuan Chen also uses the materials from both the British archives and the Chinese sources. He examines a small group of British merchants known

⁵⁹ James Louis Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

⁶⁰ By analyzing the modern-day Chinese government, the Nationalist and the Communist, in their attempts to mode the war into their political propaganda, she also argues that the war not only reshaped the world in which Britain became dominant at the cost of China, but also it has ever lasting impact on the Chinese society as it continues to influence the Chinese self-image and national identity. Julia Lovell, *The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams and the Making of China* (London: Picador, 2011).

⁶¹ Li argues that the differences between the Chinese understanding of law and the interpretation of it by the Western countries lied in the heart of these confrontations. Li Chen, *Chinese Law in Imperial Eyes: Sovereignty, Justice, & Transcultural Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

as the 'Warlike Party' and their role in starting the Opium War, with an attempt to debunk all the previous conceptions about how the war was started. He suggests that the war was started under the effort of this group of individuals who saw the opportunity for the British to defeat China for its economic gain while they were sojourning in Canton and thus returned to London to urge the British parliament to launch the war.⁶²

Although Mao Haijian relies mostly on Chinese materials with some from the British sources, he also uses a wealth of personal memoirs and correspondence of the Qing officials in addition to the Qing archives. Mao launched a comprehensive examination of the war, in order to offer a revisionist view of the war to the most common understandings of it among the Chinese scholars. Mao argues that the personal character and sense of moral among the Qing officials such as Lin Zexu and Qishan mattered to the war as much as the diplomatic missteps and military weakness of the Qing dynasty.⁶³

Similar effort in telling personal experiences can also be found in publications on the subjects indirectly related to the Opium War, although many of these publications only use the materials in Western languages. For example, Robert Neil uses an array of British source including diplomatic correspondence, personal diary, and customs files to tell a 'big story' through 'little tales'. In the book, the authors examines the first five treaty ports open to the EuroAmericans after China's defeat in the first Opium War and sequent signing of a series of treaties with the EuroAmerican countries. Neil paid quite a considerable attention to the Chinese people through his story telling, albeit his study reflects mostly the Western perspective on China.⁶⁴

In another example, Peter J. Kitson provides an important research on the cultural context within which the British decided to invade China. By using a good deal of writings, many of which were personal, from the British diplomats, missionaries, travellers, traders and even novelists, the author shows how the public perceptions among the British who influenced their decision to start the war.⁶⁵

A list of this kind of books will include Dennis Abrams's treatment of the clash between the British and the Chinese cultures and the conflict that manifested itself in many exchanges between the two countries, such as during the exchange of

⁶² *Merchants of War and Peace: British Knowledge of China in the Making of the Opium War*, (Hong Kong Univ Press, 2017).

⁶³ Haijian Mao, *Qing Empire and the Opium War* (S.l.: Cambridge Univ Press, 2016).

⁶⁴ Bickers.

⁶⁵ Peter J. Kitson, *Forging Romantic China: Sino-British Cultural Exchange 1760-1840*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

gifts, the differences in etiquette, and more specifically, the argument over whether the British should follow the Chinese kowtowing procedure.⁶⁶ Robert A. Bickers's examination of the effects of the war from its inception to shortly after the Qing dynasty was over.⁶⁷ Eric Ringmar's research on how the attempt by the Europeans to enforce the European culture onto the China led to the destruction of the Summer Palace in China.⁶⁸ And Adrian G. Marshall's book on the infamous steam-powered British naval vessel used in the Opium War, which did most of the fighting against the Chinese wooden warships.⁶⁹

Despite the achievements of these new studies, however, we can see the lack of attention on the Chinese people who were caught in the war: their experience, suffering, and struggle. If one takes a closer look at the publications after Hevia's, one will notice that when it comes to China, almost all the attentions about China have gone to the Qing officials such as Lin Zexu and Qishan or individuals like the opium dealers but very little to the average Chinese people who were nevertheless deeply impacted by the war. Thus, I suggest that we bring the experiences of the Chinese people back into our study of the Opium War and to provide our readers "paralleled stories".⁷⁰

Actually, since the beginning of this century, a growing number of leading historians in the field of China studies have already started to pay attention to the experiences of the ordinary people, especially during and after a war period (Timothy Brook 2005, R. Diana Lary 2010, Keith Schoppa 2011, Sheila Miyoshi Jager and Rana Mitter 2007, David Der-Wei Wang 2004, and William Rowe 2007).⁷¹ Like those scholars, we shall pay close attention to the sufferings of the

⁶⁶ The author suggests that this cultural clash set up for how the Chinese were going to deal with the foreigners: with much uneasiness and resentment. Dennis Abrams, *The Treaty of Nanking* (New York: Chelsea House, 2011).

⁶⁷ Robert A. Bickers, *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire, 1832-1914* (London: Penguin, 2012).

⁶⁸ Erik Ringmar, *Liberal Barbarism the European Destruction of the Palace of the Emperor of China* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), ressource électronique.

⁶⁹ Adrian G. Marshall, *Nemesis the First Iron Warship and Her World* (Singapore: Ridge Books, 2016).

⁷⁰ C. A. Bayly, "Rallying around the Subaltern," in *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*, ed. Vinayak Chaturvedi (London: Verso, 2012), 126.

⁷¹ Timothy Brook, *Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005). Diana Lary, *The Chinese People at War: Human Suffering and Social Transformation, 1937-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). R. Keith Schoppa, *In a Sea of Bitterness: Refugees During the Sino-Japanese War*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011). Sheila Miyoshi Jager and Rana Mitter, *Ruptured Histories: War, Memory, and the Post-Cold War in Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007). Dewei Wang, *The Monster That Is History: History, Violence, and Fictional Writing in Twentieth-Century China*, (Berkeley: University of California Press,

people, including women, children, and the elderly, while demonstrating how the Opium War connected different parts of the globe negatively. By focusing on the average people, we will have a better understanding of the war, and therefore the entire world.

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